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Soviet Relations with West Germany

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SOVIET RELATIONS WITH WEST GERMANY

The main postulates of Soviet policy toward West Germany (FRG) have not really altered in the last two decades. Nevertheless, Moscow has had to use different approaches to Bonn because of changing circumstances in Eastern Europe and has seen advantages in new approaches because of developments in Western Europe. Thus the Russians in recent months have made a series of moves designed to test how far West Germany will go in its eagerness for progress on its eastern policy. At the same time, the USSR evidently has hoped it can placate its allies in Eastern Europe, who have long feared any Soviet-FRG contacts, and encourage stresses within Bonn's coalition government and on FRG-Allied relations.

The Soviets lately have spoken with several voices and have varied their tactics and emphasis at different levels and times. Since early last fall Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin and Foreign Minister Brandt have had several informal talks centering on renunciation of force agreements. During the same period the Soviet Government has sent Bonn a formal statement expressing concern about "neo-Nazism," a memorandum and other diplomatic approaches focused on alleged FRG attempts to "incorporate West Berlin," and a note setting a stiff price on an exchange of declarations renouncing the use of force. In recent efforts to dissuade the FRG from more conspicuous demonstrations of its ties with West Berlin, Soviet officials have hinted both at possible "difficulties" and at possible bargains benefiting the city.

The Soviets simultaneously have abused Bonn in public and cajoled it in private. None of this, however, suggests that Moscow is prepared to break away from its basic Germany policy, which for years has been the bedrock of Soviet diplomacy in Europe.

Challenge to Soviet German Policy

Moscow's German policy still consists of four fundamental theses: there are two sovereign German states: their borders are permanent; West Berlin is a "separate entity," and West Germany should not develop, possess, or control nuclear weapons. The

Soviets surely have sensed, however, that the ground on which this policy rests is rapidly shifting.

The Soviets are somewhat on the defensive in the face of Bonn's persistent efforts, despite repeated rebuffs, to engage them and their European allies in dialogues on topics--such as recognition questions, troop reductions, and borders--that have long been avoided. Moscow is somewhat uneasy about the powerful pull West Germany exerts on Eastern Europe and about the process of maneuver under way there. It is surely concerned over the recent resurgence of national interest that has caused increased fluidity in European arrangements.

Last year the Soviets saw their allies break ranks on how to do business with West Germany. Bucharest and Belgrade have established diplomatic relations with Bonn, and Prague has permitted the opening of a permanent West German trade mission with semidiplomatic status and some consular functions. New men have come to power in Czechoslovakia and may be more willing to move toward recognition of Bonn, encouraging Budapest and Sofia to follow suit.

The Soviets have no reason to fear sudden alliance-switching by their Eastern European allies. The USSR in recent years has actually encouraged Eastern European countries to do business with the West in order to develop more viable economies and thus place fewer demands on Soviet support. Nevertheless, the FRG remains Russia's bete noire on the continent, and Moscow as well as its East German and Polish allies are happiest when West German - Eastern diplomacy is inactive and uneasy when it is not.

Moscow's Latest Moves

On the other hand, the collective leadership in the Kremlin, despite its conservative bent, is tempted by the present European scene to do some probing and perhaps even to run some risks. The year ahead holds the prospect that Western Europe's growing interest in detente and in exploring new security arrangements could be accelerated by agreement on a nonproliferation treaty (NPT), substantial Western troop withdrawals, and the fact that in 1969 members are entitled under the NATO treaty to announce their intention to withdraw from the alliance. The Soviets have been encouraging Western Europe to take a fresh look at East-West relations. Moscow views with some disquiet any moves by Bonn which could thwart this approach and which could, over the longer run, pose some challenge to the territorial status quo.

The Soviet memorandum on Berlin--warning Bonn about expanding its ties with the city--may reflect genuine fears that the FRG might force Moscow's hand and bring about unwanted tension. Ties between Bonn and Berlin are regarded by the Soviets as incompatible with the principle that the city is an entity entirely separate from the "two Germanies."

Much of Moscow's public posture--both in propaganda and in official statements such as the broadside of 8 December accusing Bonn of fostering neo-Nazism--is clearly designed to reassure the chronically nervous East German regime that the Soviets are not being careless of Pankow's interests while they are talking with the FRG. These verbal attacks also serve a wider purpose. Fear of a revived and aggressive Germany is one factor linking the Eastern European countries with the USSR, and the Soviets exploit it fully.

At the same time, Moscow is not averse to sowing discord in the Bonn coalition, although this appears to be a secondary rather than the paramount aim of Soviet diplomacy. This objective may have been a factor, for example, in the timing of the Soviets' memorandum of 6 January to Bonn about its ties with Berlin. They took the occasion of a brief out-of-town trip by Chancellor Kiesinger to deliver the memorandum to foreign minister Brandt, who was acting chancellor.

The Soviets probably feel that their messages are more likely to strike a responsive chord with Brandt, since Eastern policy issues necessarily figure prominently in his party's political fortunes.

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The Real Soviet Fears

The suspicion of Bonn's motives that is so evident in Moscow's strident anti-German propaganda is not, however, merely contrived for effect. Moscow's fears of a resurgence of German power may appear to be exaggerated, but in large measure are a reflection of Russian psychology. The Soviets cannot easily forgive and forget 20 million war dead, and their German policy is fraught with emotional as well as political and strategic considerations.

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The whole point for Moscow in building an Eastern European empire in the first place was protection from Germany. The bogey man of West German "revanchism" helped hold that empire. Some Soviets may at times look back with nostalgia at the East-West confrontation at the height of the Cold War which, however dangerous, made simpler

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the politics of drawing the lines on the German question. Moscow cannot take its German policy for granted any more. Its application has become more a source of friction than a rallying point for Eastern European Communists.

At a conference of European Communists at Karlovy Vary, Czechoslovakia, last spring--ostensibly convened to deal with questions of "European security" (i.e., Germany)--the change that has taken place was clearly evident. Public treatment of West Germany was hackneyed and hurried. Brezhnev used his first speech as Soviet party boss primarily to promote Moscow's image as a peaceful participant in European affairs. The brief conference apparently was adjourned a day early to keep disagreement over German policy from breaking into the open. Even the once tightly-knit Warsaw Pact clan which met in Bucharest the year before to draw up a joint pronouncement on European security has since disagreed--and in some instances bitterly disputed--the meaning of what they said.

The Soviets, of course, would prefer an evolution in Europe which would permit them to reap the benefits of normal relations with the West while preserving hegemony in the East. Moscow still is trying--albeit with increasing difficulty--to have it both ways. It would like to promote a loosening of bonds within the Western Alliance and at the same time maintain cohesion in its own camp.

Moscow's Price for Progress

Moscow realizes that the currents of change in Europe make it more difficult to concert bloc contacts with the West. It has no magic formula with which to ensure their direction and control. It can be expected to try to coordinate them, however, at least to assure that concessions are not made to Bonn on key questions, and that the cost to West Germany for any real movement on these matters does not go down. Russian interest in bringing about Bonn's acceptance of East Germany and present European frontiers is genuine. The Soviets would have no regrets if that status quo were to be frozen forever.

Although the Soviets have not closed the door to direct overtures from Bonn, they are setting tough terms. The day the new coalition government was installed in Bonn, Premier Kosygin--then in Paris--publicly reiterated Moscow's conditions that Bonn must meet in order to achieve improved relations with the Eastern bloc: renunciation of nuclear weapons, acceptance of the Oder-Neisse frontier, and recognition of East Germany.

These conditions are, of course, not basically new, but the Soviets have introduced some embellishments. Less than a year ago, for example, Soviet Ambassador Tsarapkin remarked informally that he was optimistic that Soviet-FRG relations could some day be made friendly. He then hastened to recite

"certain obstacles" Bonn first must overcome, including the usual recognition of existing frontiers and two German states. The ambassador then added that Bonn should liberalize trade with the Soviets, and implied that it also should deal with re-emerging "neo-Nazi forces" and drop its claim to be the sole representative of the German people. A German diplomat told Tsarapkin a thaw in USSR-FRG relations could begin if only Moscow would make a gesture of good will, such as an invitation to Kiesinger to visit Russia. Tsarapkin was so unenthusiastic about the suggestion that he threw in two more prerequisites for good measure: a West German commitment to deliver steel pipe to the USSR, and acceptance of an atom-free zone in Europe.

The Soviets customarily paint an attractive picture of the prospects better relations could bring, then point to the political price tag. It has been enough for Moscow, by demanding diplomatic recognition of East Germany, to price rapprochement out of Bonn's reach. As recently as 29 January 1968, the Soviets were testing in this fashion Bonn's desire for progress in its Eastern policy. To bring about negotiation of an exchange of declarations with the USSR renouncing the use of force, Bonn was told that it would have to make far-reaching concessions that would all but recognize East Germany. Moreover, it was to accept existing European frontiers and acknowledge that the Munich agreement was invalid from the start, and renounce its claim to speak for all Germans, its alleged efforts to get nuclear weapons, and its "illegal encroachments" in Berlin.

Prospects

Russia's long-term goal in Europe still is to ward off any possibility of German reunification, and Moscow does not feel compelled to alter its policy of forcing Bonn to bear the cost of any improvements in Soviet-German relations.

Although the Soviets surely are apprehensive about their future relations with the Chinese, they do not now feel compelled by any strategic military threat from Peking to pay a high political price in Europe to secure their western flank.

Thus, there is likely to be no marked change in Moscow's conduct of its German policy over the near term. The Soviets will not close off the quiet, indeterminate dialogue with Bonn. They will mollify East German and Polish fears by making clear in public that there is no change in Moscow's terms for the solution of the German problem. In private, the Soviets presumably will caution other Eastern European capitals against precipitate and unconditional acceptance of Bonn's overtures. In this fashion, Moscow hopes to hold the line against change detrimental to its interest in preserving the division of Germany. Meanwhile, Soviet diplomacy will try to foster a mood of expectancy in Western Europe that pan-European harmony and new security arrangements await only Bonn's abandonment of its "aggressive designs," and its acceptance of the "real situation" resulting from World War II.

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